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# The intifada of Spain's Ceuta

*Jihadi forces could be setting their sights on "reconquering" Spanish areas in North Africa.*

By Aaron Hanscom for Strategic Studies Group   Monday, May 21, 2007

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Muslim worshippers exiting mosques in Spain's North African enclave of Ceuta last month were handed pamphlets titled "Do you believe the PP can defend the Muslims of Ceuta?" Juan Vivas, the Mayor-President of Ceuta, immediately accused the leftist political coalition responsible for putting out the pamphlets of trying to divide Ceuta "between Muslims and Christians." Indeed, the pamphlets cite as a warning a statute of the center-right Popular Party (PP) which declares that the PP "is influenced by the values of liberty, democracy, tolerance and Christian humanism from the Western tradition." Also on the pamphlets - and printed above a photo of José María Aznar, Tony Blair and George W Bush standing together at the Azores Summit - is the claim that former Prime Minister Aznar once asked Muslims to apologize for "the eight centuries of Al-Ándalus."

Aznar, in fact, never made such a demand. His remarks at the Washington-based Hudson

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Institute in September 2006 were meant to shine light on a double standard that exists in the world today: While Muslims constantly demand apologies from the West, they rarely feel compelled to apologize for their own actions. The truth is that Spaniards like Aznar are not the ones seeking apologies. Much rather, it is the Muslim world that is focused on the past, as the obsession of many Muslims to reconquer Al-Ándalus makes clear.

The autonomous regions of Ceuta and Melilla are seen by Islamists as the opening fronts in their anticipated reconquest of Spain. Last year a North African group calling itself Nadim al-Magrebi warned of "a holy war against the infidel Spanish state which has occupied the two cities." Al-Qaida's number two, Ayman Zawahiri, has called for Islamic land to be reconquered from "Al-Ándalus to Iraq" and compared the "Spanish occupation of Ceuta and Melilla" to the Russian occupation of Chechnya and the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

And as can be seen in those two conflict zones, calling on Islamists to end the occupation of "holy" land inevitably leads to violence in the area. Gustavo de Arístegui, the Foreign Affairs Spokesman of the PP and author of *The Jihad in Spain: The obsession to reconquer Al-Ándalus*, believes Islamists have already turned Ceuta and Melilla into "laboratories" where they can "test all their theories concerning the reconquering of territory that they believe should be returned to Islamic rule."

Indeed, there are disturbing signs of a burgeoning intifada against Spanish rule in Ceuta. In their paper titled *Favorable situations for the jihadist recruitment: The neighborhood of Príncipe Alfonso (Ceuta, Spain)*, Javier Jordan and Humberto Trujillo of the University of Granada detail the full extent of Islamic radicalism in the border town.

Resembling the combustible suburbs of Paris, Príncipe Alfonso is essentially off-limits to the National Police and Guardia Civil except in emergency situations or during raids because of the risks officers face when entering the town. Recently the local police station and its lone police car were burned. Not only are ambushes of police cars common in Príncipe Alfonso, but emergency calls are frequently made in order to trap police officers. Shouts referring to the 'Intifada of Ceuta' are often heard during such ambushes. The resulting chaos has led to a situation where even the city buses cannot run safely.

The only authority in Príncipe Alfonso comes from Islamic extremists who are intent on imposing their Salafist interpretation of Islamic law. For example, boys are routinely castigated for playing games with girls on the street. Jordan and Trujillo suspect that 'moral squads' which intimidate or attack girls who don't wear the veil or men who drink alcohol in public may already exist. Moreover, the poverty of the city is blamed on Catholic rule.

These troubling social conditions, combined with the jihadist calls for the liberation of the "occupied" enclaves, have turned Ceuta and Melilla into the principal targets of Islamist terrorism in Spain. The Guardia Civil has warned in an internal memo that "support cells for Islamist terrorists" exist in the two regions. Meanwhile, National Court Judge Baltasar Garzon recently told the daily *La Vanguardia*: "The beaches of Ceuta and Melilla, first, and the (Iberian) Peninsula and continental Europe ... are preferred targets of the new terrorist strategy of Al Qaeda that is being developed in North Africa."

In fact, just last year a planned terrorist attack was disrupted in Príncipe Alfonso. Police in Ceuta dismantled a cell made up of at least 11 individuals in December. The members were charged with belonging to the Salafia Yihadia terrorist group which forms part of the al-Qaida network in North Africa. It now appears that the group's plan to steal weapons and explosives from a local military base and carry out an attack during Ceuta's annual festival had reached a mature phase.

Just as disturbing was the revelation that the individuals were in contact with Spanish soldiers of Moroccan origin from whom they hoped to obtain explosives and strategic information. Muslims make up approximately 30 percent of the Spanish forces in Ceuta and Melilla, and Jordan believes that the infiltration of jihadists into the Spanish army is a very real possibility. He notes that already "military intelligence has detected isolated cases of radical individuals whose contracts to continue serving in the Spanish army have not been renewed."

The Unión Democrática Ceutí (UDCE) - the political party in Ceuta that receives most of the Muslim vote - has strongly rejected the non-renewal of Muslim soldiers. In fact, at mosques throughout Ceuta the UDCE has distributed thousands of pamphlets denouncing the "persecution of the Spanish soldiers of the Muslim faith." Such victim mongering (which was also evident in the UDCE's aforementioned anti-PP pamphlet campaign) has become an effective way for Muslim groups to portray the legitimate terrorism concerns of Spaniards as nothing more than fear mongering.

This tactic can be seen in a recent article from Reuters (*Terrorism fears cause tension in Spanish enclave*), in which the author accepts at face value the opinions of local Muslims that the Islamist threat in Ceuta is overestimated. The Reuters article supports the claim that in Príncipe Alfonso "people are sick of what they describe as constant media depictions of Muslims as terrorists" with quotes from local Muslims like Mohamed Ali, the leader of UDCE.

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The deceptions of Muslim leaders like Ali belie a desire to make the city Muslim. Considering the fact that Ceuta's Muslims number 27,000 out of a population of 71,500 and the likelihood that Muslims will become the majority in the next decade, there is a good chance that dream will soon become a reality. The concern for Spaniards is whether a Muslim Ceuta will be more loyal to Spain or to the Islamists intent on liberating it.

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